

# RELATION OF THE ISLAND OF FLORIDA

by

*Luis Hernández de Biedma*

Newly Translated and Edited by

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With Footnotes by

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and

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# *Introduction*

## *Biedma's Account of the Expedition*

*by John E. Worth*

Luys Hernández de Biedma accompanied the De Soto expedition as factor of the Crown, and while his role in the expedition appears to have been small, as judged by all of the documents, his brief relation is the only complete account for which the original document survives. It is located in the General Archive of the Indies in Seville, in Patronato 19, Ramo 3. The account comprises twenty pages written in an even hand and is personally signed by Biedma. While this manuscript was penned only a short time after the expedition, from Biedma's testimony before the Consejo de Indias in 1544, its contents were not published until the mid-nineteenth century. The first and only complete English translation from the original Spanish was published in 1866 by Buckingham Smith<sup>1</sup> and has been reprinted several times by various editors.

The following translation was drawn from microfilm of the original manuscript (at the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville) and a nearly flawless printed transcription, both of which have been checked by this author during an examination of the original in Seville. Throughout, the goal has been to present as closely as possible in English the account as Biedma related it in Spanish. The following translation is therefore largely literal, with only occasional and minor restructuring of the original syntax in order to render specific passages into English more effectively. It is important to note that the original manuscript possesses no punctuation and no paragraphs, and thus these have been created based on grammatical structure and content. All names are preserved precisely as originally written. Interpolations by this editor are set off by brackets, and selected original Spanish terms are bracketed following their translation where they first appear in the relation. Where appropriate, certain common

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<sup>1</sup>Buckingham Smith, *Narratives of the Career of Hernando de Soto in the Conquest of Florida* (New York: Bradford Club Series, No. 5, 1866).

Spanish terms remain untranslated. Footnotes have been added to provide additional information where precise meaning seems important or where meaning is ambiguous, and to provide supplementary commentary and information.

## RELATION OF THE ISLAND OF FLORIDA . . . 1539<sup>2</sup>

by *Luys Hernández de Biedma*

We arrived at the port of Baya Honda and disembarked six hundred and twenty men and two hundred and twenty-three horses. As soon as we disembarked, we found out from some Indians that were captured that there was a Christian there in the land who was one of those who had gone with Pánfilo de Narváez, and we went in search of him; a *cacique* who was about eight leagues from the port had him. We came upon him on the road; he was already coming toward us, for when the *cacique* found out that we had disembarked there, he asked the Christian if he wished to come where we were. He told him yes, and [the *cacique*] sent nine Indians with him. He was naked like them, with a bow and some arrows in his hand, his body decorated like an Indian. As the Christians came upon them, they thought that they were Indians who came to spy on them; they went toward them, and they fled to a small forest [*montecillo*] that was nearby. The horses reached them, and they gave a lance-blow to an Indian and easily might have killed the Christian, because he knew little of our language, since he had forgotten it. He remembered how to call to Our Lady, and by this he was recognized to be a Christian.

We brought him with much joy to where the Governor was. He had been among those Indians for twelve years, and he also knew their language; he had been speaking it for so long that he was among us more than four days before he could join one word with another, since upon saying one word in Spanish, he would say another four or five in the language of the Indians, until finally he was again able to speak our language well. He knew little of the land and had neither seen nor heard of things only twenty leagues away. He told us upon seeing us that there was not a bit of gold in the land.

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<sup>2</sup>The date here is a later filing note and refers to the beginning date of the events recounted in the relation. The exterior page of Biedma's relation includes the following brief descriptions: "Relation of the outcome of the armada which Captain Soto led" and "Relation of the outcome of the journey of Captain Soto, and of the quality of the land through which he walked."

All of us who had disembarked departed from the port of Baya Honda in order to penetrate the interior, except twenty-six on horseback and sixty foot soldiers that remained to guard the port until the Governor responded or sent for them. We went west<sup>3</sup> and then turned northwest. We had news of a cacique that the Indians told us everyone paid tribute to; he was named Hurripacuxi, and he was up to twenty leagues from the coast. We went from here, crossing some swamps [*ciénagas*] and rivers [*ríos*], another fifteen or twenty leagues from there to a town [*pueblo*] that the Indians made out to us to be very large, so much so that they told us that its people, shouting, made flying birds fall. We arrived at this town, which was called Etocale. It was a small town; we found some corn and beans and little dogs to eat, which was no small relief for the people, who were dying of hunger.

We stayed here seven or eight days, during which some excursions were made to capture some Indians who might guide us to the province of Apalache, which was widely known in all the land. They captured three or four Indians, but the one who knew the most did not know two leagues farther on from that town. We left from here traveling ever toward New Spain [Mexico], at a distance of ten or twelve leagues from the coast. We passed some towns in the five or six days that we traveled, until we arrived at a fair-sized village [*poblazón razonable*] called Aguacalecuen. We found all the Indians gone, having fled for the woods; here we halted another six or seven days in order to look for some Indians who might guide us. Going to look for some Indians, ten or twelve women were captured, among whom, they told us, one was a daughter of the cacique; for this reason the cacique came to us in peace and said that he would give us interpreters and guides for farther on, but he never gave them to us. We had to take him with us, and at the end of six or seven days that we traveled, about three hundred and fifty Indians came forth to attack us with bows and arrows, intending to take the cacique away from us. We killed some of them and apprehended all the rest. Among them there were some Indians who knew of the interior, and there they told us many great lies.

We crossed another river, which was in a province called Veachile, and we found some towns on the other bank, all abandoned, although we did not fail to find in them what we had need of, which was some food. We departed

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<sup>3</sup>Biedma indicated direction using the terms *via* and *vuelta* interchangeably to signify way, or perhaps direction, in phrases such as *la via del Poniente*, or "the way of the west." This first reference to direction seems to be incorrect (since they landed on the west coast), although Biedma's directions elsewhere seem quite accurate.

from here for another town, which is called Aguile. This [town] borders on [*confina con*] that province of Apalache; a river divides the one province from the other. On this river we made a bridge of many pines tied to one another, and we crossed with great danger, because on the other side there were Indians who defended the crossing against us. When the Indians saw that we had crossed the river, they went away to the nearest town, which is called Yvitachuco, and waited there until we arrived in view of the town. Upon seeing us appear, they set fire to all the town and fled.

In this province of Apalache there are many towns, and it is a land of plentiful food; they call all this other land that we traveled through the province of Yustaga. We went to another town which is called Yniahyco, and here it seemed to us that it was time to find out about those who remained at the port, and that they should know about us, because we intended to plunge so far into the interior that we might not be able to have more news of them. We had already walked one hundred and ten leagues from where we left them up to there, and the Governor sent them a message to come where we were.

Here we went to look for the sea, which was about nine leagues from this town, and we found on the shore the place where Pánfilo de Narváez<sup>4</sup> made the boats, because we found the site of the forge and many bones of the horses, and the Indians told us through the interpreter how the other Christians had made those boats there. Juan de Añasco made certain signs in some trees that were on the shore of the sea, because the Governor ordered him to call the people who had remained at the port, and to send them by land the way we had come, and to come back by sea in two brigantines and a small vessel [*batel*] that was there, and to bring them to that province of Apalache; meanwhile we remained waiting there.

Juan de Añasco sent the people by land, and he came back by sea as the Governor commanded him, where he endured much hardship and danger, because he did not find that coast; he did not find a trace of what he had seen by land before he went there by sea, because the inlets [*ancones*] were shallow, and at high tide they had water but at low tide they were dry. We made a *piragua*<sup>5</sup> that each day went out two leagues into the sea to see if the brigantines were coming, in order to show them where they were to stop. Thanks to God they came to them by sea and the other people by land.

The brigantines having come, the Governor commanded that they go

<sup>4</sup>The Narváez expedition skirted the Gulf Coast in 1528.

<sup>5</sup>A *piragua* was a larger vessel than a canoe, but similarly long and narrow.

west, to see if they could find some port that might be near there, in order to know the coast, if they [the army] should find something in the interior. Francisco Maldonado, a nobleman from Salamanca, went in the brigantines, cruising the coast and entering all the coves [*caletas*] and inlets and rivers that he saw, until he arrived at a river where he found a good entrance, and a good port and a town of Indians on the seacoast. Some came to barter with him, and he captured one of those Indians and came back for where we were.

He spent two months on this journey, yet to all of us it became a thousand years through detaining us there so long, since we had news of the interior. When Maldonado came, the Governor told him that since we were going in search of the land that Indian told us was on another sea, he should return in those brigantines to the island of Cuba, where Doña Isabel de Bobadilla, the wife of the Governor, was, and that if within six months he had no news of us, he should come back in those brigantines and cruise the coast as far as the river of Espiritu Santo [the Mississippi], because we would have to return there.

The brigantines went to Cuba, and we headed north, in order to see what the Indians told us. We traveled five days through an uninhabited region [*despoblado*] until we arrived at a large and very swift [*muy corriente*] river. We could not make a bridge because of the strength with which it flowed, but we made a piragua in which we crossed. On the other bank we found a province, which is called Acapachiqui, very abundant in food of that which the Indians ate. We saw some towns of the province, and others we could not see because it was a land of very great swamps. Here we found a difference in the houses of the Indians; we found them as caves below the ground,<sup>6</sup> while up to there they were covered with palms and straw.

We went onward and came upon<sup>7</sup> two other rivers. We had to make bridges of tied pines on them, as we were accustomed to make them. We arrived at another province, which is called Otoa. We found a fair-sized town, larger than any we had found up to there. From there we went to other towns of another province, which was about two days from there,

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<sup>6</sup>*Como cuevas debajo de tierra.* This probably refers to semi-subterranean structures with depressed floors, a type of architecture that archaeologists recognize to have been common in some regions at this time. Elvas also notes a difference in architecture but places it at Toa to the immediate north.

<sup>7</sup>The original manuscript has a word crossed out in front of *topamos*, or "we came upon." It appears to be *pasamo*, suggesting the first intention was to write *pasamos*, or "we crossed," which was corrected.



where we captured some people unawares, who had not heard about us. They agreed to come to serve us in peace so that we would return the people that we had taken from them. The Governor returned them, and the only ones they did not take from him were some interpreter guides for farther on. We spent five or six days in passing through this province, which is called Chisi, where we were well served by the Indians, from the little that they had.

From here we traveled another three days without seeing a village, until we came to another province, which is called Altapaha. Here we found a river that did not flow to the south like the others that we had crossed. It flowed east, to the sea, where the *licenciado* [lawyer] Lucas de Ayllón had come;<sup>8</sup> because of this we gave much more credit to what the Indian told us and believed all the lies that he had told us to be true. This province was well populated with Indians, and they all served us. The Governor questioned them about that province that we were searching for, which was called Cofitachique, and they told us that it was not possible to go there; there was neither a road nor anything to eat on the road, and we would all die of hunger.

We went onward to other caciques, who were named Ocute and Cofaqui, and they gave us some of the foods they had and told us that if we wished to go to make war on the lady of Cofitachique, they would give us all that we might want for the journey. They told us that there was no road by which to go, since they had no dealings with one another because they were at war; sometimes when they came to make war on one another, they passed through hidden and secret places where they would not be detected, and they spent twenty or twenty-two days on the road and ate only herbs and some toasted corn that they brought.

Having seen our determination, they gave us eight hundred Indians to carry our food and clothes, and other Indians to guide us; they headed straight to the east and traveled for three days. The Indian who had deceived us told us that in three days he would get us there. At the end of the three days we were already beginning to see the lie of the Indian. The Governor did not stop following the road that he had started on because of that, and he commanded that all should save as much food as they could, because he suspected what afterward happened, that we would be in great hardship and necessity. We traveled through this uninhabited region thirteen days, and at the end of them we arrived at some cabins [*cabañas*]. The Indians had al-

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<sup>8</sup>Ayllón established a short-lived colony on the Atlantic Coast in 1526.

ready lost their bearings, and they did not know where to go or what road to give us.

The Governor went out to look for it and returned despairing of being able to find it; he made the people return about half a league from there to a large river, and there he began to give a pound of pork to each Christian as rations from some pigs that we were taking with us, and we ate it boiled in water without salt or anything else. And from here the Governor sent people in two directions to look for a road; one he sent upriver, north and northeast, and the other he sent downriver, south and southeast, and he gave to each one a limit of ten days to go and come back, to see if they found some road or saw a trace of a town.

He who went south and southeast came back in four days with news that he had come upon a little village [*poblezuelo pequeño*] with some food, and he brought from it three or four Indians who spoke with that Indian who deceived us, and they also understood the interpreter. This was no little thing for us because of the great necessity for interpreters that there is in the land. And he again affirmed the lies that he had told us, and we believed him through seeing the interpreter speak with those Indians. We all then departed to go to that little village and await there those who had gone in other directions to look for a road, and we were here four or five days, until all the people gathered. We found about fifty fanegas<sup>9</sup> of corn and some flour of toasted corn, and many mulberry trees loaded with mulberries, and some other small fruit.

We departed from here for the town of Cofitachique, which was two days' journey from this little village. It was on the bank of a river that we believe was the river of Santa Elena, where the licenciado Ayllón was. Having arrived at this river, the lady of the town sent us a niece of hers, and some Indians brought her on a litter with much prestige. And she sent a message to us that she was delighted that we had come to her land, and that she would give us whatever she could and had, and she sent a string of pearls of five or six strands to the Governor. She gave us canoes in which we crossed that river and divided with us half of the town. She was with us three or four days and then went away to the woods.

The Governor sent people to look for her, and when she could not be found, he opened a temple<sup>10</sup> that was there, where the important people of

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<sup>9</sup>A *fanega* of corn equals approximately 100 pounds, making Biedma's amount roughly 5,000 pounds.

<sup>10</sup>*Mezquita*, probably referring to a temple or other public structure.

that land were buried, and we gathered from there a quantity of pearls; there must have been up to six and a half or seven arrobas<sup>11</sup> of them, although they were not good because they were damaged through being below the ground and placed amidst the adipose tissue of the Indians. Here we found buried two Castilian axes for cutting wood, and a rosary of beads of jet and some *margaritas* of the kind that they carry from here [Spain] to barter with the Indians.<sup>12</sup> All this we believed they had obtained from barter with those who went with the licenciado Ayllón.

According to the information that we had from the Indians, the sea was up to thirty leagues from there. We found out that the people that went with Ayllón scarcely went inland at all but rather stayed always on the seacoast, until Ayllón became sick and died. Afterward the people killed one another, each one intent on taking command, and many others [died] of hunger; one who had found himself there<sup>13</sup> told us that of six hundred men that Ayllón had settled in that land, not more than fifty-seven had escaped, largely because of losing a large ship loaded with provisions.

We were in the town of this lady for about ten or eleven days, and then it was advisable for us to leave from there in search of land where there was food, because here there was none, except a very limited amount for the Indians to eat, and we, with the horses and the people, used it up very quickly. We turned again north and traveled eight days through land poor and lacking in food until we arrived at a land that they call Xuala, and here we found little population, because of the land being rugged, but still we found some Indian houses. In these mountains we found the source of the great river by which we left,<sup>14</sup> and we believed it to be the river of Espiritu Santo. We went onward to a town that is called Guasuli, where they gave us a quantity of dogs and some corn, of which they had little.

From here we traveled four days and arrived at a town that is called

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<sup>11</sup>One *arroba* equals approximately 25 pounds, placing the estimated weight of the pearls roughly between 160 and 175 pounds.

<sup>12</sup>Beads of jet, commonly used for rosaries, have not been recognized archaeologically prior to the mid-seventeenth century. The *margaritas* noted in the text were common trade beads but have not been positively identified. For further information, see Kathleen Deagan, *Artifacts of the Spanish Colonies of Florida and the Caribbean, 1500-1800* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987).

<sup>13</sup>This individual might have been a survivor of the 1526 Ayllón colony who was also a member of the De Soto expedition.

<sup>14</sup>The members of the expedition believed that these were the headwaters of the Mississippi River, through which they would ultimately depart from Florida.

Chyha, which is very abundant in food. It is situated on an island in this river of Espiritu Santo, which from its source makes very large [islands]. In this province we began to find the towns palisaded [*cercados*], and here the Indians extract a great quantity of oil from nuts. We stayed here twenty-six or twenty-seven days, in order to give some relief to the horses, because they were very fatigued from little to eat and much labor. We departed from here, along the bank of the river, and arrived at another province that is called Costehe, where the towns are likewise on islands in the river.

From here we went to the province of Coça, which is one of the best lands that we came upon in Florida. Its cacique came forth to receive us on a litter with great festivity and many people, because he has many subject towns. The next day in the morning all the Indians fled. We captured the cacique, so that he would give us Indians to carry our burdens, but he detained us several days before he gave them to us. We found in this province plums like those from here in Castille, and a great quantity of wild vines, on which there were very good grapes. We departed from here toward the west and southwest, and went through towns of this cacique for five or six days, until we arrived at another province that is called Italisi. We found the people gone and went to look for them. Some Indians came to us, whom the Governor sent to call the cacique; he came to us and brought us as present twenty-six or twenty-seven women and hides of deer and whatever they had.

From here we headed south, drawing near the coast of New Spain, and we passed several towns until we arrived at another province that was called Tascaluza, of which the cacique was an Indian so large that, to the opinion of all, he was a giant. He awaited us in peace in his town. We made much festivity for him when we arrived and jousted and had many horse races, although he appeared to think little of all this. Afterward we asked him to give us Indians to carry the burdens, and he responded that he was not accustomed to serving anyone, rather that all served him before. The Governor commanded that he not be allowed to go to his house, but rather that he should be detained there; as a result he felt that he was detained among us, and because of this he committed the ruin that afterward he inflicted on us.

Because he said that he could not give us anything there, that we should go to another town of his, which was called Mavila, and that there he would give us what we requested of him, we headed for there, arriving at a large river [*río caudal*], which we believe is the river that flows into the bay of Chuse. Here we had news of how the boats of Narváez had arrived in need of water, and that here among these Indians remained a Christian who was

called Don Teodoro, and a black man with him. They showed us a dagger<sup>15</sup> that the Christian had. We were here two days making rafts to cross this river, during which the Indians killed a Christian who was one of the Governor's guard. In a fit of anger, he [the Governor] treated the cacique badly and told him that he was going to burn him unless he gave him the Indians that had killed the Christian. He said that in his town of Mavila he would give them to us.

This cacique was an Indian who brought along many other Indians who served him, and he always walked with a very large fly-flap [*moscador*] made of feathers, which an Indian carried behind him in order to block the sun. We arrived at Mavila one day at nine in the morning. It was a small and very strongly palisaded town and was situated on a plain. There were some Indian houses on the outside of the palisade, but we found that the Indians had demolished all of them to the ground in order to have the field more clear. Some important Indians came forth to us upon seeing us and asked the Governor, through the interpreter, whether he wished to spend the night there on that plain or if he wished to enter within the town and said that in the afternoon they would give us the Indians for the burdens. It seemed to the Governor that it was better to enter in the town with them, and he commanded us all to enter in there, and so we did it.

Having entered within, we were walking with the Indians, chatting, as if we had them in peace, because only three hundred or four hundred appeared there, but there were a good five thousand Indians in the town, hidden in the houses. We did not see them, nor did the Indians appear. As they made festivity for us, they began to do their dances and songs. In order to dissemble, they had fifteen or twenty women dance in front of us. After they had danced a little while, the cacique arose and entered one of those houses. The Governor sent a message for him to come outside, and he said that he did not wish to. The Captain of the Governor's guard entered to bring him out, and he saw so many people within, and so ready for war, that he thought it a good idea to go out and leave him, and he said to the Governor that those houses were full of Indians, all with bows and arrows, ready to do some treachery.

The Governor called to another Indian who was passing by there, who likewise refused to come. A nobleman who found himself alongside him seized him by the arm in order to bring him, and then he [the Indian] gave a

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<sup>15</sup>*Puñal*, or a poniard.



*Spanish Swordsman, Arquebusier, and Pikeman about 1540. Fighting against soldiers equipped in this manner was demoralizing for native peoples who, however, showed great courage and ingenuity when facing them. The pikeman wears quilted cotton armor, which was much lighter than chain mail or plate armor and yet was effective protection from native archery. (Courtesy of Osprey Publishing, London)*

pull that set himself free. Then he [the nobleman] put hand to his sword and gave him a slash that cut off an arm. Upon wounding this Indian, all began to shoot arrows at us, some from within the houses, through many loopholes that they had made, and others from outside. As we were so unprepared because we thought that we had met them in peace, we suffered so much damage that we were forced to leave, fleeing from the town, and all that the Indians brought us in our loads remained within, as they had unloaded it there. When the Indians saw us outside, they closed the gates of the town and began to beat their drums and to raise banners with a great yell, and to open our trunks and bundles and display from the top of the wall all that we had brought, since they had it in their possession.

As soon as we left the town, we mounted our horses and encircled the entire town, so that the Indians might not get away from us on any side, and the Governor decided that sixty or eighty of us should dismount, those of us who were best armed, and that we should form ourselves in four squads and assault the town on four sides, and that the first to enter should set fire to the houses, so that they might not do us more damage from within, and that we should give the horses to other soldiers who were not armed, so that if some Indians should come forth from the town in order to flee, they might overtake them. We entered within the town and set fire, where a quantity of Indians were burned, and all our supplies were burned, so that not one thing remained.

We fought that day until it was night, without one Indian surrendering to us, rather they fought like fierce lions. Of those who came out, we killed them all, some with the fire, others with the swords, others with the lances. Later, near nightfall, only three Indians remained, and they took those twenty women that they had brought to dance and placed them in front of themselves. The women crossed their hands, making signs to the Christians that they should take them. The Christians came to take them, and they turned aside, and the three Indians who were behind them shot arrows at the Christians. We killed two of the Indians, and one who remained alone, in order not to surrender to us, climbed a tree that was in the wall itself, and removed the cord from the bow and attached it to his neck and to a branch of the tree and hanged himself.

This day the Indians killed more than twenty of our men, and two hundred and fifty of us escaped with wounds, for we had seven hundred and sixty arrow wounds. We treated ourselves that night with the adipose tissue of the dead Indians themselves, since we had no other medicine, because all had burned that day. We stayed here treating ourselves twenty-seven or

twenty-eight days, and thank God we all healed. We took the women and divided them among the most seriously wounded, in order that they might serve them.

We heard through news from the Indians that we were up to forty leagues from the sea. Many wished that the Governor would go to the sea, because they [the Indians] gave us news of the brigantines, but he did not dare, for the month of November was already half over and it was very cold, and he felt it advisable to look for a land where he might find provisions in order to be able to winter. In this [land] there were none, because it was a land of little food. We turned again north and walked ten or twelve days' journey, with great hardship from cold and from waters that we crossed on foot, until we arrived at a province, well-provisioned [*gruesa*]<sup>16</sup> and with plenty of food, where we could halt while the fury of the winter passed, because more snows fell there than in Castille.

Having arrived at this province of Chicaça, the Indian warriors came forth to defend a crossing of a river that we had to cross, and they detained us there three days. In the end we crossed in a piragua that we made, and all the Indians fled to the woods. After seven or eight days, messengers from the cacique came to the Governor, saying that he and all his people wanted to come to serve us. The Governor received him well and sent a message for him to come in any case, and that he would give them many of the things he had brought. The cacique came and brought many Indians, who carried him on their shoulders. He brought us some little dogs and hides of deer. The cacique remained with us, and the other Indians went away again. Each day Indians went and came and brought many rabbits and whatever they could have in the land, and also at night some Indians were captured, who, under the pretense of being at peace, came to see the manner in which we slept and how we guarded ourselves.

Unaware of the treachery that they had intended, we told the cacique that we wished to depart the next day in order to continue our journey. He went away, and that night he came upon us, and as they already knew where we had placed our sentries, more than three hundred Indians entered in the town without the sentries detecting them, two by two and four by four, with some little jars [*ollillas*] in which they brought fire, in order not to be noticed or seen. At the time that the other Indians were arriving, the sentries detected the throng of people, and they sounded the call to arms; already these

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<sup>16</sup>The term *gruesa* more precisely connotes corpulent, or stout, which seems to refer to the abundance of food and supplies.



others had set fire to one [house] in the town. They did us very great damage and killed that night fifty-seven horses and more than three hundred hogs and thirteen or fourteen men, and it was a great mystery of God why, without our resisting them or doing a thing, the Indians turned to flee and left us, because if they had pursued us, not a man of all of us would have escaped.

We then moved from there to a cabin, which was about one league from there. We found out that the Indians had decided to return that night upon us, except that thanks to God it rained a little, so that because of the water they abandoned their plan. We were so poorly supplied that although we still had some horses, we had neither saddle, nor lance, nor shield, because all had burned. Here we hurried to make shields and lances and saddles, as best we could and knew how. After five days the Indians, their squadrons formed with much order, turned again upon us and came to strike on three sides. As we were now more watchful, we detected them and came forth to them and routed them and did them some damage, so that thanks to God they did not return any more. We were here about two months, making what we had need of in the way of saddles and lances and shields, and then we departed toward the northwest for another province that is called Ali-bamo.

Here something happened to us that they say has never happened in the Indies, which was that in the middle of the road where we were to pass, without having food to defend nor women to guard there, but rather only to prove themselves against us, they made a very strong barricade<sup>17</sup> of poles in the middle of the road, and about three hundred Indians placed themselves there, with determination to die before they relinquished it. As they saw us appear, some Indians came forth from the barricade to shoot arrows at us and threaten us that no man would remain alive. From this we considered that barricade differently, and with the people that defended it, we believed they had some food there or something that they were guarding, of which we had much need, because we were expecting to cross an uninhabited region of twelve days' duration, in all of which there was not one thing to eat, except what we carried there. About forty of us dismounted and placed ourselves on two sides, so that at the sound of a trumpet we would charge the barricade all at once. We did it thus and entered, although we suffered some damage, for they killed seven or eight men and wounded twenty-five or twenty-six of us. We captured some Indians and others we killed, and we

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<sup>17</sup>The term *albarrado* may refer to an earthen wall or trench, implying more than a simple wall of timber.

found out from them that they had done that only with the intent of proving themselves against us, and for no other purpose.

We looked for food there, although with difficulty, in order to enter into our uninhabited region. We walked through it for twelve days with great labor, because of the wounded and sick that we were carrying. We arrived one day at midday at a town that is called Quizquiz, so unexpectedly that they had no news of us. The Indian men were gone to do their labors at their cornfields. We captured more than three hundred women who were in the town and the pittance of hides and blankets that they had in their houses. Here we found the first little walnuts of the land,<sup>18</sup> which are much better than those from here in Spain. This town was near the river of Espiritu Santo. They told us that this and other towns there pay tribute to a lord of Pacaha, who was well known in all the land.

When they found out that we had taken those women, they came to us in peace and asked the Governor to give them back. The Governor did so and asked them to give us some canoes in order to cross that large river, and they said that they would give them to us, but they never did it. Rather, they gathered together in order to make war on us and came within view of the town where we were, but in the end they did not dare to assault us and turned back. We left that town and went to make camp on the bank of the river in order to organize how to cross it. We saw that on the other side was a great number of people ready to defend the crossing against us, and they had many canoes. We decided to make four large piraguas, so that each one of them would be able to carry sixty or seventy men and five or six horses.

It took us twenty-seven or twenty-eight days to make these piraguas. During this time the Indians each day at the hour of three in the afternoon placed themselves in two hundred and fifty canoes that they had there, very large and well shielded [*muy empavesadas*], and drew near the other shore where we were with a great yell. They shot all the arrows that they could and returned to the other bank. When they saw that we already had our boats ready to cross, they all fled and left the crossing undefended. In good order, we crossed the river, which was almost a league wide and nineteen or twenty *brazas*<sup>19</sup> deep. On the other bank we found some good towns. We went up the river, because in order to go to that province of Pacaha we had to turn upriver.

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<sup>18</sup>Probably pecans.

<sup>19</sup>One *brazo* (an armspan) equals approximately 5.5 feet, making Biedma's depth estimate roughly 104 to 110 feet.

Before we got to it, we arrived at another province of another lord, who was named Ycasqui, with whom he [Pacaha] was always at war. This cacique came forth in peace, telling us that he had been hearing of us for a long time, and that he knew that we were men from heaven and that their arrows could not do us harm, and that therefore they wanted no war with us, but rather wanted to serve us. The Governor received them very well and refused to let any soldiers enter in his town, so that they might not do it any damage, and we made camp on a plain in view of the town of the cacique. We were there two days.

The day that we arrived, the cacique spoke with the Governor, telling him that he knew that he was a man from heaven, and since he had to continue onward, he should leave a sign indicating whom he could ask for help for his wars, and whom his people could ask for water for their fields, because they were in great need of it, since their children were dying of hunger. The Governor commanded that they should make a cross of two very tall pines, and he told him that he should return the next day, that he would give him the sign of heaven that he asked him for, and that he should believe that he would lack nothing if he had true faith in it. The next day the cacique returned to us, saying many things because we delayed so much in giving him the sign that he had asked for, since he was so willing to serve us and follow us, and he made there such a great lament because they did not give it so quickly that he made us all weep from seeing the devotion and insistence with which he requested it. The Governor commanded that he and all his Indians should return in the afternoon and told him that we would go to his town and bring him the sign that he had requested.

He came in the afternoon with all his people. We went in procession up to the town, and they came after us. Having arrived at the town, we found that the caciques there were accustomed to have, next to the houses where they live, some very high mounds [*cerros*], made by hand, and that others have their houses on the mounds themselves. On the summit of that mound we drove in the cross, and we all went with much devotion, kneeling to kiss the foot of the cross. The Indians did as they saw us do, neither more nor less. They brought a great quantity of canes [*cañizos*] and made a wall around it. We returned to our camp that night.

The next day in the morning we traveled toward Pacaha, which was up-river. We walked two days, and then we saw the town on a plain, well palisaded and with a moat of water around it, dug by hand. We drew as near to the town as we could. When we were near, we halted, because we dared not enter in it, and walking around on one side and another, we saw that on one

side many people were fleeing. Then we assailed the town and entered without any defense. Very few people were taken, because all had already fled. They were unable to keep the pittance that they had in a safe place, and all of it remained in the town. While we were halted in view of the town, because we dared not enter, we saw coming at our back a large squadron of Indians. We thought that it was people who were coming to the aid of the town, and we went toward them and found that it was the cacique we had left behind, where we had placed the cross. They were coming after us to aid us if we should need it.

We led him to the town, and he began to give so many thanks to the Governor for the cross that he had left him, saying that it had rained a great deal in his land the day before, and that all his people were so content that they did not wish to leave us but rather to go away with us. The Governor placed him in the town and gave him all that we found in it, which is much wealth for them, including some beads that there are of snail shells from the sea<sup>20</sup> and some small hides of cats and buckskin, and some corn that there was in the town, with which he sent him away happy to his land.

We were in this town twenty-seven or twenty-eight days to see if we could have a road north in order to traverse to the South Sea [the Pacific Ocean]. From here some excursions were made to capture Indians who might inform us. One expedition in particular was made to the northwest, because they told us that there were large villages through which we could go. But we traveled eight days through an uninhabited land of very great swampy lakes, where we did not even find trees, but rather some great plains, where was grass so tall and so strong that even with the horses we could not force our way through it. At the end of this time, we arrived at some Indian settlements [*ranchos*] that were covered with sewn reeds [*enea cosida*]. When they wish to carry them away, they roll up the reeds of the covering and an Indian man carries it, and the woman carries the framework of poles over which it is placed, and it is set up and taken down so easily that even if they moved every hour they could carry their houses with them.

We found out from these Indians that there were some little settlements [*ranchuelos*] of that sort across the land, and all they did was set up their house where there were many deer, or on a swamp where there were many fish, and when they had frightened away the game and could not catch fish

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<sup>20</sup>*Caracoles de la mar*. The term *caracol marino* denotes the periwinkle shell, suggesting that these beads were made from periwinkles. Such beads are relatively common in the archaeological record.

as easily as at first, they moved from there with their houses and all that and went away to another place where they could find fresh game. This province was called Caluçi; they were people that paid little attention to sowing, because they maintained themselves on this fish and meat.

We returned to this town of Pacaha, where the Governor remained, and we found that the cacique had now come in peace. He was there in the town with him, and at this time the other cacique came from back where we had placed the cross. It was something to see, seeing both the caciques together, who were enemies. The Governor commanded each one of them to sit at his side. It was a marvelous thing what each one went through to win the right hand from the other.

Having seen that there was no road to traverse to the other sea, we turned south and returned with the cacique to where we had placed the cross, and from there we headed southwest to another province which is called Quiguatate. This was the largest town that we found in Florida; it was on a branch of the great river. Here we tarried eight or nine days to look for interpreters and guides, still with the intention, if we were able, to traverse to the other sea, because the Indians told us that eleven days from there was a province where they killed some cows,<sup>21</sup> and that from there we would learn of interpreters in order to cross to the other sea.

We departed with these guides for that province, which is called Coligua, without any road, but rather they led us each night straight to some swamps of water from which we might drink, where we found a quantity of fish. We traveled over much flat land and other land of rugged mountains, and we struck pointblank at the town of Coligua, as if they led us by royal road, seeing that in all their life no man had passed through there. We found much food in this land and a great quantity of tanned cow tails and others for tanning. We inquired about a road in the direction we were heading and whether there was any village in that district, far or near. They were never able to tell us anything except that if we wished to travel where there might be a village, we had to turn west-southwest.

We turned again to where the Indians guided us, and we went to some scattered villages that were called Tatilcoya. Here we found a large river, and afterward we saw that it flowed into the great river [the Mississippi]. We had information that on this river upstream was a great province called Cayas. We went to it and found that it was all scattered population, though heavy, and several excursions were made. The land is very rugged with mountains.

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<sup>21</sup>Refers to the bison.

An excursion was made in which the cacique and many people were apprehended. When we asked for news of the land, they told us that if we went upriver, we would come upon a well-provisioned province that was called Tula. The governor wished to go see if it was a place where the people could winter, and he went with twenty on horseback. He left all the rest in this province of Cayas.

Before arriving at the province of Tula, we crossed some rugged mountains and arrived at the town without their having heard anything of us. We began to apprehend some Indians, and they began to call to arms and make war on us. They wounded that day nine or ten horses and seven or eight Spaniards, and such was their ferocity that they joined together, eight by eight and ten by ten, and came at us like wounded dogs. We killed about thirty or forty Indians. It seemed to the Governor that it was not good to halt there that night, because he led very few people, and he returned by the road on which we had come to a clearing in a lowland that the river made,<sup>22</sup> having crossed a bad pass of the mountain range because there was fear that the Indians might take us at that pass.

The next day he arrived where his people were, and there were none of those Indians we had brought, nor did he find in that province Indians who could understand the interpreter. He commanded that all should prepare to travel to that province [of Tula]. We then went there. The day after we arrived, three very large squadrons of Indians came upon us at dawn, on three sides. We came forth to them and routed them and did them some damage, as a result of which they attacked us no more.

After two or three days, they sent the messengers as if in peace. Although we did not understand one thing for lack of the interpreter, through signs we told them that they should bring us interpreters for those [Indians] behind us, and they brought us five or six Indians who understood the interpreters that we brought. They asked us what people we were and what we were looking for. We asked them about some large provinces where there would be much food, because already the cold of the winter was greatly menacing us. They told us that the way that we were going, they knew of not one large village. They pointed out to us that if we wanted to turn east and southeast or northwest that we would find large villages.

Having seen that we did not have any other choice, we turned again southeast and went to a province called Quipana, which is at the foot of some very rugged mountains, and here we went east and traversed these

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<sup>22</sup>*Un raso de una vega quel rio hacia*, probably referring to the floodplain.

mountains and descended to some plains, where we found a village suited for our purpose, because there was a town nearby that had much food, and it was on a large river that ended at the great river by which we left. This province was called Viranque.

Here we spent the winter. There were such great snows and cold weather that we thought we were dead men. In this town died the Christian who had been one of Narváez's men, whom we had found in the land and taken along as interpreter. We left from here at the beginning of March, since it appeared to us that the fury of the cold weather had abated, and we traveled downstream along that river, where we found other well-populated provinces with a quantity of supplies, until we arrived at a province that seemed to us to be one of the best that we had come upon in all the land, which is called Anicoyanque. Here another cacique, who was named Guachoyanque, came to us in peace. He has his village on the large river and wages much war with this other [province] where we were. The Governor departed then for this other town of Guachoyanque and took the cacique with him. It was a good town, well palisaded and strong. It had little food, because the Indians had hidden it all.

Here the Governor was already determined, if he were to find the sea, to make brigantines in order to send word to Cuba that we were alive, so that they might provide us with some horses and the things that we had need of. He sent the captain south to see if he could discover some road to go to look for the sea, because from the account of the Indians nothing could be found out about what there might be, and he returned saying that he did not find a road nor a way to cross the large swamps along the great river. The Governor, from seeing himself cut off and seeing that not one thing could be done according to his purpose, was afflicted with sickness and died.

The Governor dead, he left Luis de Moscoso appointed as Governor. We decided that since we could not find a road to the sea, we should head west, and that it could be that we might be able to get out by land to Mexico, if we did not find anything else in the land or any place to halt. We walked seventeen days' journey until we arrived at a province of Chavete, where the Indians made much salt; we did not find out anything about the west. From here we went to another province that is called Aguacay. We spent another three days' journey getting there, still going straight west. From here the Indians told us that we could not find more villages, but rather that we should descend southwest and south, because there we would find villages and food, and that going the way that we asked about there were some great stretches of sand [*arenales grandes*], and neither villages nor any food.

We had to return where the Indians guided us, and we went to a province that is called Nisione, and another that is called Nandacao, and another that is called Lacame, and across land more and more sterile and with less food. We went along asking about a province that they told us was large, which was called Xuacatino. This cacique of Nondacao gave us an Indian to guide us, with the intent of placing us where we could never get out, and so he guided us across rugged land and off road, until finally he told us that he no longer knew where he was leading us, and that his lord had commanded him to lead us where we would die of hunger.

We took another guide who led us to a province that is called Hais, where cows are in the habit of gathering at times, and as the Indians saw us enter through their land, they began to cry out that they should kill the cows that were coming;<sup>23</sup> they came forth to shoot arrows at us and did us some damage. We departed from here and arrived at the province of Xacatin, which was among some dense forests and lacked food. From here the Indians guided us east to other towns, which were small and had little food, saying that they were leading us to where there were other Christians like us. It seemed afterward to be a lie and that they could not have news of any others but us; since we had made so many turns,<sup>24</sup> in some of these they must have heard of our passing.

We turned south again, with purpose of living or dying or traversing to New Spain, and we walked about six days' journey south and southwest. There we halted and sent ten men on swift horses to travel eight or nine days, or as many as they were able, to see if they could find some town in order to replenish the corn so we could continue on our way, and they traveled as far as they could and came upon some poor people who did not have houses, but rather some miserable little settlements where they situated themselves, and they neither sowed nor gathered anything but rather maintained themselves only on fish and meat.

They brought three or four of these Indians. We found no one who could understand the interpreter. Having seen that we had lost the interpreter and that we found nothing to eat, that we were now lacking the corn that we had carried on our backs, and that it was [impossible<sup>25</sup>] for so many people to traverse so miserable a land, we decided to return to the town where Gover-

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<sup>23</sup>Probably the Spaniards' horses.

<sup>24</sup>Here the term *vuelias* seems best translated as "turns," although it may also connote ways or even directions (as it is used in the rest of the relation), referring to multiple legs of the journey.

<sup>25</sup>While the text states *posible*, the context indicates this to be an error.



nor Soto had died, because there it seemed to us that it was possible to fashion vessels to leave the land. We returned along that same road that we had followed until we arrived at the town where the Governor had died.

Having arrived here, we did not find as good provisions as we thought, because we did not find food in the town, since the Indians had hidden it. We had to look for another town in order to be able to winter and fashion the ships. Thank God we discovered two towns much to our purpose that were on the great river and had a great quantity of corn and were palisaded, and there we halted and built our ships with much labor. We made seven brigantines and spent six months in finishing them. We cast off the brigantines in the river, and it was a thing of mystery that even though they were caulked only with the bark of those mulberry trees and without any pitch, we found them watertight and very good. We towed some canoes downriver with us in which we carried twenty-six horses, so that if at the seacoast we should find some village that could sustain us with food, from there we would send a pair of brigantines to give a message to the Viceroy of New Spain, so that he might provide us ships in which we could leave the land.

The second day that we were going downriver, there came forth to us about forty or fifty very large and swift canoes of Indians, among which there was a canoe that carried eighty Indian warriors, and they began to shoot arrows at us and pursue us, shooting more arrows at us. It seemed to some of those in our ships that it was cowardly not to attack them, and they took four or five small canoes of those that we were towing and went toward the canoes of the Indians, who, as soon as they saw them, encircled them as best they could and would not let them leave from among them. They upset the canoes in the water, and thus they killed this day twelve very honorable men, because we could not aid them, since the current of the river was so great and we had few oars in our ships. With this victory, the Indians came following us downriver, until we arrived at the sea, which took nineteen days' journey. They did us much damage and wounded many people, because since they saw that we did not have arms with which to do them damage from a distance, for we no longer had either arquebus or crossbow but only some swords and shields, they now had lost their fear and drew very near to shoot arrows at us.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>The final section of Biedma's relation is written in a different hand than the bulk of the manuscript, and using different ink than both the text and the signature immediately below, suggesting that this final section was written by a different scribe (and may have been added after the signature, which is overlapped by this final section). It is possible that Biedma origi-

We came forth to the sea through the mouth of the river and went across a bay that the river makes, so large that we navigated three days and three nights with reasonable weather, and in all that time we did not see land. It seemed to us that we were far out at sea, and at the end of these three days and three nights we gathered water as fresh as from the river, which was good to drink. We saw some little islets toward the southwest side, and we went to them, and from there we went along the coast, gathering shellfish and looking for things to eat, until we entered the river of Panuco, where we were very well received by the Christians.

LUYS HERNÁNDEZ  
DE BIEDMA<sup>27</sup>

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nally intended to terminate the relation here, for he mentioned their departure from the river into the sea in the previous sentence.

<sup>27</sup>Following Biedma's relation is an appended four-page document entitled "Memorial of the persons who came from Florida, which persons they are, and from where they are natives." This list of 221 survivors of the De Soto expedition seems to be in a different hand and appears on distinctive paper that has been folded in a manner different from the Biedma relation, suggesting that it was added separately to Biedma's text. The list is presented and examined by Ignacio Avellaneda, *Los sobrevivientes de la Florida: The Survivors of the De Soto Expedition* (Gainesville: University of Florida, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, 1990).